



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 665

[Docket No. 211221-0265]

RTID 0648-XP016

**Pacific Island Pelagic Fisheries; 2022 U.S. Territorial
Longline Bigeye Tuna Catch Limits**

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Final specifications.

SUMMARY: NMFS specifies a 2022 limit of 2,000 metric tons (t) of longline-caught bigeye tuna for each U.S. Pacific territory (American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), the territories). NMFS will allow each territory to allocate up to 1,500 t in 2022 to U.S. longline fishing vessels through specified fishing agreements that meet established criteria. The overall allocation limit among all territories, however, may not exceed 3,000 t. As an accountability measure, NMFS will monitor, attribute, and restrict (if necessary) catches of longline-caught bigeye tuna, including catches made under a specified fishing agreement. These catch limits and accountability measures support the long-term sustainability of fishery resources of the U.S. Pacific Islands.

DATES: The final specifications are effective [*insert date 30 days after date of publication in the FEDERAL REGISTER*], through December 31, 2022. The deadline to submit a specified fishing agreement pursuant to 50 CFR 665.819(b) (3) for review is [*insert date 180 days after the date of publication in the FEDERAL REGISTER*].

ADDRESSES: Copies of the Fishery Ecosystem Plan for Pelagic Fisheries of the Western Pacific (FEP) are available from the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council), 1164 Bishop St., Suite 1400, Honolulu, HI 96813, tel 808-522-8220, or www.wpcouncil.org.

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, the Council and NMFS prepared environmental analyses that support this action and are available at <https://www.regulations.gov/docket/NOAA-NMFS-2021-0076>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Lynn Rassel, NMFS PIRO Sustainable Fisheries, 808-725-5184.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS is specifying a 2022 catch limit of 2,000 t of longline-caught bigeye tuna for each U.S. Pacific territory. NMFS is also authorizing each territory to allocate up to 1,500 t of its 2,000 t bigeye tuna limit, not to exceed a 3,000 t total annual allocation limit among all the territories, to U.S. longline fishing vessels permitted to fish under the FEP. A specified fishing agreement with the applicable territory must identify those vessels.

NMFS will monitor catches of longline-caught bigeye tuna by the longline fisheries of each U.S Pacific territory, including catches made by U.S. longline vessels operating under specified fishing agreements. The criteria that a specified fishing agreement must meet, and the process for attributing longline-caught bigeye tuna, will follow the procedures in 50 CFR 665.819. When NMFS projects that the fishery will reach a territorial catch or allocation limit, NMFS will, as an accountability measure, prohibit the catch and retention of longline-caught bigeye tuna by vessels in the applicable territory (if the territorial catch limit is projected to be reached), and/or vessels in a specified fishing agreement (if the allocation limit is projected to be reached).

You may find additional background information on this action in the preamble to the proposed specifications published on October 27, 2021 (86 FR 59357). Regardless of the final specifications, all other existing management measures will continue to apply in the longline fishery.

Comments and Responses

On October 27, 2021, NMFS published the proposed specifications and request for public comments (86 FR 59357); the comment period closed on November 12, 2021. NMFS received comments from two sources who generally supported the proposed action. A third commenter expressed

concern about the status of bigeye tuna, and we respond below.

Comment: Overfishing mature bigeye tuna reduces the stock and prevents stock growth, longline fishing is directed at adult tuna capable of reproducing, and reducing catch limits will help to improve this species' stock and prevent them from being overfished.

Response: There are two stocks of Pacific bigeye tuna: the Western and Central Pacific stock and the Eastern Pacific stock. According to the most recent stock assessments, neither stock is overfished or subject to overfishing. In developing the territorial bigeye tuna catch allocation limits, NMFS and the Council considered a range of catch and allocation limits, taking into consideration sustainability of the stock, decisions of regional fishery management organizations, and the needs of Pacific Island fishing communities. The 2022 allocation limits allow for the sustainability of the bigeye tuna stock and are consistent with the FEP, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), and other applicable laws.

Classification

Pursuant to section 304(b)(3) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the NMFS Assistant Administrator (AA) has determined that this final rule is consistent with the FEP, other

provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and other applicable laws.

The Chief Counsel for Regulation of the Department of Commerce certified to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration that the proposed specifications would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities. NMFS published the factual basis for the certification in the proposed specifications, and we do not repeat it here. NMFS received no comments relevant to this certification; as a result, a final regulatory flexibility analysis is not required, and none has been prepared.

This action is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

This document contains no information collection requirements under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801, et seq.

Dated: December 21, 2021.

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Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory
Programs,
National Marine Fisheries Service.